



United States
Department of
Agriculture



I am Judd Brooke.
I am a conservationist.

Standing Tall

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When the going gets tough, the tough keep going. Not even Hurricane Katrina, one of the worst natural disasters in America's history, could keep Judd Brooke from accomplishing his goals on his land.

Brooke owns Brookewood Farm, a 4,500 acre piece of land in Hancock County, Mississippi, the state's southernmost county and the hardest hit by the hurricane. With the first parcel purchased by Brooke's parents in 1952, the property features beautiful longleaf pine stands and excellent wildlife habitat. A conservationist at heart, Brooke has been working for years to improve the habitat for the trees to create healthier, more sustainable stands.

Then in 2005 Katrina came in like a wrecking ball and destroyed many of his treasured trees and his hard work. Undaunted, Brooke headed to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office in

Poplarville, MS to visit with NRCS District Conservationist Marty Fulton.

Through his discussions with Fulton, Brooke learned NRCS offered several programs that could help him re-establish the woodlands that had been destroyed.

“The NRCS has programs that offer financial assistance to help landowners with different conservation management activities,”

- Marty Fulton, District Conservationist

“As far as forestry goes, most of the time the average landowner is going to sign up for the site prep, prescribed burning, fire lanes and tree planting. Depending on the site, post spraying is an option some landowners choose.”

Through the agency's Environmental Quality Initiative Program (EQIP) Brooke established 270 acres of longleaf pines on his property,

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as well as adopted prescribed burning on the established longleaf pines in order to create a desirable habitat. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provided Brooks the opportunity to plant longleaf pines on over 400 acres of his property.

Even though his land was left in an altered state after the natural disaster, Brooke remained committed to restoration and conservation. He wanted to do all he could to help the land heal itself. To further his conservation efforts, Brooke signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

CSP offers technical and financial assistance for the adoption of new conservation activities and for improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities on working private agricultural and forest lands. CSP rewards advanced conservation across an entire farming operation and supports the continual improvement of conservation systems through a variety of conservation enhancement activities.

One of the CSP enhancements Brooke chose was to adopt

Occupied with cleaning up after Hurricane Katrina, this portion of Brooke's land had grown dense with undesired shrubs and trees.



understory management to restore 20 acres of longleaf pine habitat in an area that was overgrown. Brooke had intended to thin the area before the hurricane hit, but after the hurricane he had to shift his focus to more pressing needs. Prescribed burning wasn't an option because the fire would get too hot and damage the trees. Under Fulton's advice, the best option for this situation was for Brooke to use a mulcher attached to a skid steer. He completed the 20 acres and was so pleased with the results, he kept going and cleaned up other areas of his property in the same way.

"Without the help from NRCS and the programs they offer, it would have been impossible for me to have done these activities in the period of time that I did them," Brooke says.

"I would have had to have spread the costs of putting this land back into longleaf pine production over a number of years, which would have delayed results."

A committed conservationist, Brooke seeks out opportunities to share his efforts and learn from other conservation leaders as well. He serves on the Board of

Understory mulching proved an effective way to clean up the dense brush and create better habitat for the longleaf pines.



Directors for the Longleaf Alliance, the Hancock-Harrison County Forestry and Wildlife Association, the Steering Committee of the Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council, the Board of Trustees of Wildlife Mississippi, and the Woodlands Committee of the American Forest Foundation.

As part of his outreach and education efforts, an interpretive trail sponsored by the American Forest Foundation and other partners, was opened on Brookewood Farm in 2009. This trail, which is open to the public by appointment, features various aspects of the longleaf ecosystem, with emphasis on fire ecology, invasive species control, and gopher tortoise habitat.

Brooke credits CSP for providing him with avenues and ideas to improve his property and create the type of habitat he wants.

"I have a sincere desire to improve my property," Brooke says. "I have appreciated all the help I have received from the NRCS staff and the agency's programs to help me accomplish my goals. I am delighted with the planning, delighted with success rate and the survival rate of the longleaf pines."

Although Hurricane Katrina caused some setbacks for Brooke, eleven years later his stands of longleaf pines are healthy and standing tall, a symbol of Brooke's conservation goals accomplished.

Want to learn more about the Conservation Stewardship Program?

nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill

September 2016